

The Finding of "Zach."

A CHRISTMAS STORY OF DARKY LIFE.

By Paul Laurence Dunbar, the Famous Negro Poet and Author.



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self, a mighty long ways from
hyeah."

He drew up a chair for the old man and took one himself. A few other men passed into the room and stopped to look with respectful amusement at the visitor. He was such a perfect bit of old plantation life and so obviously out of place in a Tenderloin club room.

"Well, uncle, are you looking for a place to stay?" pursued Turner.

"Not 'zackly, honey; not 'zackly. I come up hyeah a-lookin' for a son o' mine dat been away from home long to five years. He live hyeah in Noo Yoik, an' dey tell me whah I 'quahed dat I 'ble to fin' somebody hyeah dat know him. So I 'd dropped in."

"I know a good many young men from the South. What's your son's name?"

"Well, he named aftah my ol' masta, Zachariah Priestley Shackelford."

"Zach Shackelford?" exclaimed some of the men, and there was a general movement among them, but a glance from Turner quieted the commotion.

"Why, yes, I know your son," he said. "He's in here almost every night, and he's pretty sure to drop in a little later on. He has been singin' with one of the colored companies here until a couple of weeks ago."

"Hush up; you don't say so. Well, well! well! but don't Zachariah allus did have a mighty sweet voice. He tuk hit aftah his mammy. Well, I sholy is hopin' to see dat boy. He was allus my favorite, although I reckon a body ain't got no livin' right to have favorites among dey chilluns. But Zach was allus sich a good boy."

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"Dis is a mighty nice place you got hyeah. Hit mus' be a kind of a hotel or bon'din' house, ain't hit?"

"Yes, something like."

"We don't have nuffin' co'le we's jes' common fo'le, and dat's about all we in."

He wasn't nearly glad my He nevah were no great seemed to go agin his natur dat."

"Lots of 'em, lots of The crowd of men had from out of the card room, teatly to the old fellow's, but they ought to laugh, but and the twitching of their suppressed merriment."

The visitor looked around "My, what a lot of bow'dahs"

"They don't all stay oualy; 'some of them have friends."

"Den I 'low Zach'll be mus' 'scuse me fu' talkin' anxious to clap my eyes on right am' dese las' two she said an' gone, an' I p'omised mysf dis Crismus Hit do look foolish fu' a runnin' 'round de worl' a but hit do seem so had to

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Interrupted him, "This gen- turning to the old man, 'do you ever-would you-er. I've got some pretty good liquor here, ah?"

Zach's father smiled a sly smile. "I do know, sah," he said, crossing his leg high.

"I's Baptis' morn', but 'long o' dese Crismus holidays I's right fong o' a little today."

A half dozen eager men made a break for the bar, but Turner's uplifted hand held them. He was an autocrat in his way.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but I think I remarked some time ago that Mr. Shackelford was my guest." And he called the waiter.

All the men had something and tapped him with the visitor.

"Pears to me you people is mighty cleavah up hyeah; 'tain no wondah Zachariah don't wan' to come home."

Just then they heard a loud whoop outside the door, and a voice broke in upon them singing thickly, "Oh, this spo'ins' life is surely killin' me." The men exchanged startled glances. Turner looked at them, and there was a command in his eye. Several of them hurried out, and he himself arose, saying, "I've got to go out for a little while, but you just make yourself at home, uncle. You can lie down right there on that sofa and push that button there—see, this way—if you want some more today. It ain't cost you anything."

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"Why, Pap," he said when he saw the old man, "I'll be."

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THE rooms of the "Banner" Club—an organization of social intent, but with political streaks—were a blaze of light that Christmas Eve night. On the lower floor some one was strumming on the piano, and upstairs, where the "ladies" sat, and where the Sunday smokers were held, a man was singing one of the latest canon songs. The "Banner" always got them first, mainly because the composers went there, and often the air of the piece itself had been picked out or patched together, with the help of the "Banner's" piano, before the song was taken out for somebody to set to the "complaintment" to it.

The proprietor himself had just gone into the parlor to see that the Christmas decorations were all that he intended them to be when a door opened and an old man entered the room. In one hand he carried an ancient carpetbag, which he deposited on the floor, while he stared around at the grandeur of the place. He was a typical old uncle of the South, from the soles of his heavy brogans to the shiny top of his bald pate, with its fringe of white wool. It was plain to be seen that he was not a denizen of the town, or of that particular quarter. They do not grow old in the Tenderloin. He paused long enough to take in the appointments of the place, then, suddenly remembering his manners, he doffed his hat and bowed with old-fashioned courtesy to the splendid proprietor.

"Why, how'do, uncle," said the genial Mr. Turner, extending his hand. "Where did you stray from?"

"Howdy, son, howdy," returned the old man gravely. "I hails from Missippi myself, a mighty long ways from hyeah."

His voice and old-time intonation were good to listen to, and Mr. Turner's thoughts went back to an earlier day in his own life. He was from Maryland himself.

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